



Directorate of
Intelligence

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CIA/SW

SWDR 84-192JX



APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: FEB 2008

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KEY JUDGMENTS: FRENCH NUCLEAR REACTOR FUEL REPROCESSING
PROGRAM

France has a major commitment to developing a capability to reprocess civilian nuclear power reactor fuel. This program is both to support its own ambitious breeder reactor development and to generate export earnings. French attitudes toward reprocessing, especially those concerning reprocessing foreign fuel and providing reprocessing equipment and technology to other nations, run counter to US nonproliferation policies.

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KEY JUDGMENTS: FRENCH NUCLEAR REACTOR FUEL REPROCESSING PROGRAM [redacted]

The following Key Judgments are reprinted from a recently published Intelligence Assessment produced by the Office of Scientific and Weapons Research. [redacted]

A microfiche copy of the complete report--SW 84-10057. [redacted] is available from [redacted]
printed copies from CPAS/ [redacted]

France is committed to developing an economy in which nuclear energy is the major source of electrical power. This commitment has led France to develop a large-scale program for commercial reprocessing of domestic-origin spent nuclear fuel. This program is conducted by a subsidiary of the French atomic energy agency. The reprocessing effort reduces the requirements for uranium while providing a source of plutonium. The plutonium is needed for fuel for fast-breeder reactors, a key part of France's future energy developments. [redacted]

France's desire to obtain the maximum benefit from its nuclear technology, combined with its position as the most technologically advanced Western nation in commercial reprocessing, has led it to seek contracts for reprocessing foreign-origin nuclear fuel. Until the 1990s when the United Kingdom is scheduled to start a large commercial reprocessing plant, France will virtually control commercial reprocessing in the West. [redacted]

France's commitment to reprocessing will continue to result in a series of conflicts with the United States because France (as well as other West European nations and Japan) wants recovered plutonium for fast-breeder reactors. This, in turn, will almost certainly lead to US questions about the adequacy of security of the plutonium against theft or diversion during transport, storage, and fabrication. The United States can prohibit the transfer of any plutonium recovered from US-origin fuel. (Most foreign-origin fuel reprocessed in France has been of US origin.) A shipment of plutonium from France to Japan has been delayed significantly because of US concerns about the security of sea shipment. [redacted]

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France's overall commitment to nuclear energy has important benefits. France is widely seen, at least by Europeans, as the only country with a long-term commitment to nuclear power. This is a critical factor in the sale of nuclear power plants, which require 10 years to build and have a 20-year operating life. [redacted]

We believe that by the end of 1985, France will be using civilian gas-cooled reactors to meet most of its military requirements for plutonium. (France's last large dedicated military production reactor will be retired that year.) The potential production capacity of France's civilian reactors far exceeds any likely military requirement. [redacted]

France's official policy prohibiting construction of reprocessing plants for foreign countries and/or transfer of reprocessing technology is not likely to change. We believe, however, that some French suppliers will continue to circumvent the official government policy and attempt to sell prohibited pieces of equipment. [redacted]
[redacted]